

Free tuition to plug school drop outs



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CM Paul 29 May 2016 15422 views

A parish in Assam's Bongaigaon diocese with the help of a Guwahati based [NGO](#) has come up with a novel scheme to prevent high school children dropping out of school or flunking in their board examinations. Parish priest of St Joseph's Doomni parish nestled in the 1,040 hectares of Doomni Tea garden in Baksa district of north-[east India](#) says, "In the past two years I am here, I am saddened by the number of promising students who drop out of school just before their first board exams."

Fr Ethelbert Minj says, "The problem is acute [as](#) large number of students fail or do not appear for the board exams [as](#) they are weak in Maths, Science or English and cannot afford private tutors who charge Rs. 500 (approx. USD [10](#)) per month per subject."

Fr Minj who was [assistant](#) priest in the same parish some two decades ago, sought help and harnessed the collaboration of Bosco Reach Out (BRO) a Guwahati based Salesian [NGO](#) to find sponsors for the children to benefit from free coaching.

BRO was established in 1983 [as](#) a non-profit, non-political and social service wing of the Salesian Province of Guwahati in [North East India](#).

BRO director Salesian Fr K.J. Thomas proposed to find sponsors for 100 students of the parish which has population of some 12,000 Catholics spread out in 1,740 families in 27 villages about 5 to [10](#) kms radius of the parish. They belong to [Adivasi](#), [Assamese](#) and Boro population living in harmony.

The parish also runs [Don Bosco](#) School established in 1972 [as](#) [Assamese](#) medium and later in 1997 made into an English medium school under Assam Board. Today the school has 1,083 students at Doomni and two feeder schools in Bongaon and Subansiri villages totaling another 261 students.

While mobilizing students for the coaching class, Fr Minj [found](#) “a huge response of some 350 students of the neighboring schools in the parish area who wished to benefit from the scheme.”

“Today there are 235 students signed up for [2](#) hours of evening classes from Monday to Friday every week with four teachers teaching three subjects: Maths, Science and English,” says Coordinator of the Coaching Class project and Assistant Parish priest Fr Charles Deepan Lakra.

The students get daily snacks to ensure that they do not go hungry while staying back to study.

Hearing about the enthusiastic Coaching Class project Salesian provincial of Guwahati Fr V.M. Thomas promised every [student](#) three notebooks each saying, “it is gift from one of my cousins who was inspired by the ignited minds of village children who were willing to study and dreamed of a better future.”

BRO director Fr Thomas also promised “best three [student](#) toppers of the tuition classes will be invited to a [Christmas](#) party in December to BRO in Guwahati along with their teachers.”

Mr Maximus Kerketta teacher at neighbouring Nalbari High School one of four teachers at Coaching Class and [leader](#) of parish youth programs coordinated the inauguration program, 27 May.

Speaking at the inaugural function Fr Thomas congratulated Fr Minj for his “characteristic availability to come to the aid of weak students with motivation and conviction that given the chance, students can succeed.”

Fr Thomas affirmed his belief in the words of Gandhiji who said “our talents lie in the villages and given the chance they will bloom.”

He encouraged students saying, “when other students loaf about, there should be no drop outs and no failures from coaching class students.”

Fr Thomas also presented and congratulated Mr Anil Kujur, a boy from Doomni Tea [Garden](#) to become the first College lecturer at Doomni College and PhD Scholar at Assam [Don Bosco](#) University Guwahati.

“Thank you for thinking about us poor and marginalized students offering us opportunity to succeed in life,” said class IX [student](#) Mr Damien Kerketta summing up the feelings of his class mates in the welcome address.

CM Paul

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BY CM PAUL

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